

THE
PEW
CENTER ON THE STATES

The Right Policy at the Right Time: The Pew Pre-Kindergarten Campaign

Sara D. Watson, Senior Officer
The Pew Center on the States

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Dear Reader,

Nearly a decade ago, we at The Pew Charitable Trusts first became aware of the potential of high-quality, voluntary, publicly funded pre-kindergarten to address many of the long-standing educational challenges facing our nation. Even then, the evidence was strong and compelling that early learning programs can help all children develop the cognitive, social and emotional skills necessary for success in school and in life. The deeper we delved into the research, the more convinced we became that pre-k was the right policy at the right time.

In the years since, the body of evidence has grown. Numerous studies, including many from the independent National Institute for Early Education Research, which is funded by Pew, have found that current pre-k programs are working. Noted economists, including leaders at the Federal Reserve System and Nobel Laureate James Heckman, have documented significant economic benefits and impressive returns on public investments.

As the value of early education has become better understood, our campaign to advance high-quality pre-k for all three and four year olds has expanded to include state advocates, law enforcement officials, faith-based organizations, business leaders and pediatricians, among many others. Our strategy has been to highlight the research and support our partners in using the evidence to drive needed policy changes in their states. Our position as a national advocacy hub reinforces that work at all levels of government.

We are proud of the gains pre-k has made across the country over the past decade: state funding has more than doubled to nearly \$5.3 billion in FY 2010; at least 410,000 more four year olds and 46,000 more three year olds have access to quality early learning; the number of states offering or phasing in pre-k for all children has more than tripled to eight plus the District of Columbia, and two states launched their first early education programs. High-quality early learning has become the central policy issue of a vibrant, organized and collaborative movement, a testament to the cooperative approach executed by Pew's campaign.

Pew's philosophy on advancing any major policy issue is to maintain a sharp focus on a singular goal, and with this approach, our work has helped establish pre-k as the first step in a quality education. But we also know children need more supports to thrive. Pew has launched two new campaigns, for home visiting and children's dental health, to build on this momentum and win further evidence-based policy changes that generate meaningful returns to taxpayers.

The Pew pre-kindergarten campaign leads a national movement that has engaged the advocacy, business, economics, early childhood and education communities. With this strong coalition in place, we are confident that early learning programs will continue to improve and grow. Recent research has reaffirmed the link between pre-k and the broader education reform agenda that first set Pew on a search for a new policy years ago. We remain convinced that the evidence irrefutably proves the power of high-quality pre-k to provide the foundation for an exceptional education for all of our nation's children.

Susan K. Urahn
Managing Director
The Pew Center on the States

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The Right Policy at the Right Time: The Pew Pre-Kindergarten Campaign



In 2001, The Pew Charitable Trusts learned of an important strategy that could dramatically improve children's success but had been largely overlooked by policy makers – high-quality early education programs in the years just before kindergarten. Pew launched a new campaign to highlight the evidence and advance policies at the state and federal levels to provide voluntary, high-quality pre-kindergarten for every three and four year old.

Seven years later, the *Wall Street Journal* would call the pre-k movement “one of the most significant expansions in public education in the 90 years since World War I.”¹ With the help of hundreds of partners across the country and building on decades of work by children's advocates, this movement is propelling the nation towards a future in which pre-k is no longer a luxury for the rich or a social service for the poor, but an essential part of a high-quality education for America's children.

This report will answer two questions: How did this happen? And even more important: How can we use the lessons learned to inform public debates on other policies essential to help children thrive?

The momentum and experience from the pre-kindergarten campaign can inform new public debates on key issues facing states and the nation.

Pew's Approach to Policy Change

After 40 years of efforts to reform education at the local, state and national levels, Pew wanted to see greater improvements in the system and in children's achievement. In 2000, Susan Urahn, then director of education, began to survey the field to identify a new course of action where Pew could inform substantial and lasting policy change. At the suggestion of Steven Barnett, an economist at Rutgers University, she examined the data on pre-k and realized that it could have a profound impact on children's school and life success. She also learned that despite decades of hard work by advocates, both foundation funding and policy maker interest had not caught up to the research evidence on the benefits of high-quality early education.

Pre-kindergarten fit Pew's criteria for selecting issues around which it would build policy campaigns: rigorous, objective evidence of impact; bipartisan support; important yet manageable in scope and ripe for serious public debate. When these line up, Pew believes that an issue is most ready for serious consideration by policy makers and the public.

While any major policy area will have myriad important aspects, policy-making tends to be incremental. Pew's experience has shown that, when faced with a long list of legislative demands, most policy makers will throw up their hands and tell advocates to come back when they have narrowed their list. So Pew's philosophy is to examine all the factors that affect an important goal and then select a sharp focus. The approach is to identify which specific policy within a given agenda – whether the environment, the economy or consumer health – is most ripe for movement at a given time, push it as far as it will go and, when that window closes, carefully choose the next issue.

This approach does not mean that other policies related to the larger goal are less important, only less ready. They should not be ignored, just prioritized over time based on what the nation is prepared to tackle.

At any one time, hundreds of important policy issues deserve attention, but only a few are ready for serious action. This generally requires a combination of enthusiastic leaders, compelling new data or events and some deep shift in public sentiment. With respect to pre-k, several factors contributed to the “ripeness” of the policy: the growing body of research showing the importance of early brain development;² decades of advocacy for child care funding; interest among some long-standing funders in the field and the increasing understanding that many of the seeds of educational success – or failure – are sown in the earliest years. Pew's deliberations also were informed by the experiences of the three states – Georgia, New York and Oklahoma – that had already made commitments to providing pre-k for all four year olds. Among these, Georgia's program was particularly well known in the early childhood community.

On the other hand, the nation was still deeply ambivalent about public investment in out-of-home care for three- and four-year-old children, with opposition increasing with regard to even younger children. Policy makers and the public did not yet recognize pre-k as a powerful education reform rather than the last two years of child care before kindergarten.

Weighing all the risks, in the end, the combination of strong evidence of impact and the chance for Pew to make a difference convinced the organization in September 2001 to commit to a seven-to-10-year effort, assuming progress along the way indicated continued opportunity for success.

A New Campaign Design

The Pew pre-k campaign was designed from the outset to work mainly at the state level, with attention to federal policy as opportunities arose. This approach reflected the dominant role states play in education, and it provided 50 different chances to make progress, rather than the single instance afforded by a focus on federal policy. In addition, Pew concentrated its initial efforts on states where a commitment to this new idea could provide a model for the rest of the country. Then, Pew served as the hub of a multi-faceted campaign, designed at its simplest level to bring together both traditional and unlikely allies, fund good research and make the data available and accessible to policy makers.³ The campaign infrastructure consists of three main elements: advocacy, research and engaging a broad national constituency.

Focused Advocacy

As one of its first actions in the pre-k initiative, Pew funded the creation of a new project to run the advocacy effort at the national level; this choice was made because no other group was in a position to make pre-kindergarten its top issue. Originally called the Trust for Early Education and later changed to Pre-K Now, it is now a part of Pew. This decision enabled the campaign to shine a much-needed spotlight on the topic. At Pew, Sara D. Watson directed the campaign, and Pre-K Now's leaders have included Libby Doggett, Stephanie Rubin, Danielle Gonzales



and now Marci Young. Pre-K Now has been supported by leading early childhood foundations: the David & Lucile Packard, RGK, McCormick, CityBridge and Picower Foundations; the Schumann Fund for New Jersey and the Foundation for Child Development. All of these funders, and others, have also made significant contributions to the pre-k movement in their own right.

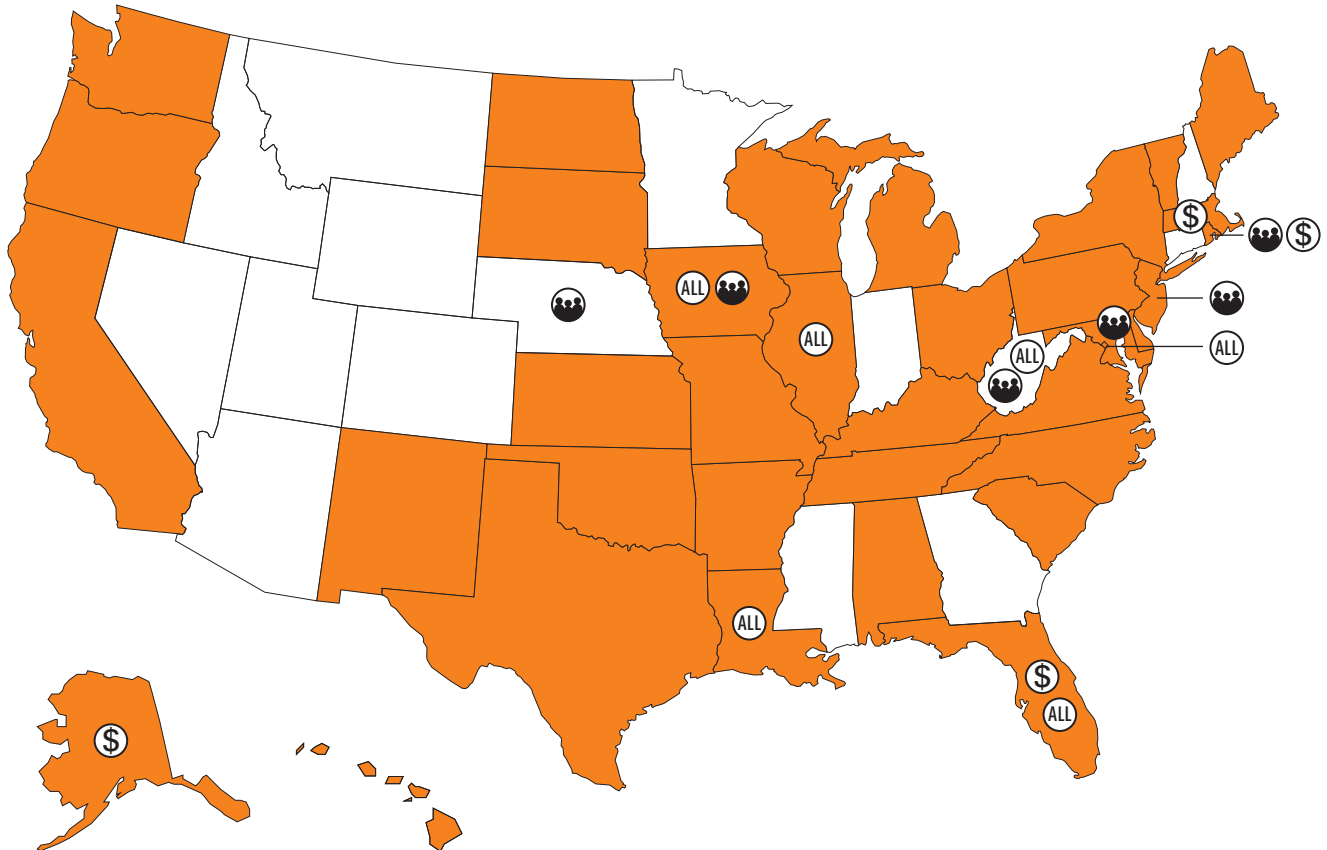
The bedrock of Pre-K Now's work is financial and technical support for public education and advocacy efforts in more than 30 states. Pre-K Now's technical assistance includes advice on policy options, peer-to-peer networking, responses to questions, communications expertise and sharing of effective materials and strategy. The support is tailored to every state's different history, political environment and advocacy capacity. For example, when Texas was seeking a way to make even incremental progress, the campaign worked with state leaders to identify specific populations of children with critical need, including those in military families and in foster care, and focused advocacy efforts on serving these groups. The Texas legislature agreed to provide pre-k to the first group in 2006 and the second in 2007.⁴

pre[k]now
a campaign of the
Pew Center on the States

A New Campaign Design

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Pre-K Now's State Campaigns & Selected Pew Initiative Results: 2002 – 2010



- Pre-K Now Campaigns
- No Pre-K Now Presence
- ALL Enacted Pre-K for All Legislation^a
- ⦿ Added Pre-K to School Funding Formula
- \$ Provided First-Time State Pre-K Investments

Pre-K Now's work and Pew's national leadership paid dividends across the country in the form of increased investments in and access to state pre-k, improved overall program quality and smarter policy-making with respect to planning, funding, governance and implementation. Importantly, the momentum created by Pew and its partners yielded significant gains not only in states with direct Pre-K Now campaign efforts, but in several other states as well.

The key partners in this effort have been the advocates leading the state campaigns, most of whom were working on behalf of young children for decades before Pew arrived and will continue that fight long after this initiative has ended. Those campaigns were run by a variety of organizations, which Pre-K Now recognized as the most capable of realizing policy change in their states. These advocacy groups either focus on pre-k or cover a range of issues and include independent nonprofits, coalitions, state government entities and research institutes. As Libby Doggett, then-executive director of Pre-K Now, put it, "we have worked with the very best advocates in the country – ones who have a track record of policy victories, who never lose focus on the goal and who work skillfully across both sides of the aisle."

^a Pre-k for all refers to all four year olds. IL and DC also include three year olds.

THE BEST ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN

BUILDS OUR NATION'S HUMAN CAPITAL,
STARTING WITH THE YOUNGEST AMERICANS

As Congress continues the critical work of economic recovery, we call for our limited resources to be invested wisely in building human capital from the ground up, starting with our youngest citizens.

The time is now. We cannot afford to wait until budgets are back "in the black" to invest in proven programs that help infants, toddlers, and young children begin school healthy and ready to succeed.

Few investments these days offer a guaranteed investment return. This is one of them. The evidence demonstrating the benefits of quality early care and education programs includes studies that show returns ranging from 2:1 to as high as 17:1.

While the choices are not easy, we are convinced that the wisest road to recovery involves research-based programs that bring short- and long-term benefits; early education and preventive health care for children are prime examples. When we help infants, toddlers, and young children develop optimally, we simultaneously:

- provide families with needed financial relief;
- create jobs;
- grow a capable, team-ready workforce for the future; and
- save states money.

As you weigh which investments will best rebuild our economy, we urge you to ask: "Does it save dollars in the long term? Improve the workforce? Make us more competitive? Or not?"

**Please choose wisely.
Our nation's economic
future depends on it.**



The Honorable Phil Bredesen
Governor of Tennessee

The Honorable Timothy M. Kaine
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable Ed Rendell
Governor of Pennsylvania

The Honorable Diane Denish
Lieutenant Governor of New Mexico

Sheriff Drew Alexander
Summit County, Ohio

Steve Bartlett
President and Chief Executive Officer,
The Financial Services Roundtable;
former U.S. Representative

Major General Buford "Buff" Blount
(U.S. Army - Retired)

Dana Connors
CEO, Maine Chamber of Commerce

Rob Dugger
Managing Director, Tudor Investment Corp;
Advisory Board Chair, Partnership for
America's Economic Success

David Fleming
President, Los Angeles County
Business Federation

Jamie Galbraith
Lloyd M. Bentsen Jr. Chair in Government/
Business Relations, LBJ School of Public
Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin

Stephen Goldsmith
Professor of Government, Harvard's
Kennedy School of Government;
former mayor of Indianapolis

James J. Heckman
Nobel Laureate in Economics and Professor of
Economics at the University of Chicago

Benjamin K. Homan
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Food for the Hungry, Inc

Sheriff Mark Luttrell, Jr.
Shelby County, Tennessee

Ray Marshall
former Secretary of Labor

Rob McKenna
Attorney General, State of Washington

Lenny Mendonca
Chairman, McKinsey Global Institute

Susan Neuman
former Assistant Secretary of Education

The Honorable Michael A. Ramos
District Attorney, San Bernardino County

John Rathgeber
President and CEO, Connecticut
Business and Industry Association

Richard Riley
former Secretary of Education

Jim Wunderman
CEO, Bay Area Council

Sheriff John Zaruba
DuPage County, Illinois

Organizations listed for
identification purposes only

Strategic Communications

A critical reason for Pre-K Now's success has been its ability both to directly utilize and to assist state campaigns in using effective communications tools to get data in front of decision makers. These tools include generation of extensive media coverage of pre-k; placement of op-eds; fast response to critical

coverage; very targeted use of paid media (see Figure 1); dissemination of key data through timely, accessible publications; an effective outreach strategy around those publications and use of new social networking tools and the latest e-advocacy technology.

Figure 1:

Pew ad, published
in *Roll Call*,
February 3, 2009

A New Campaign Design

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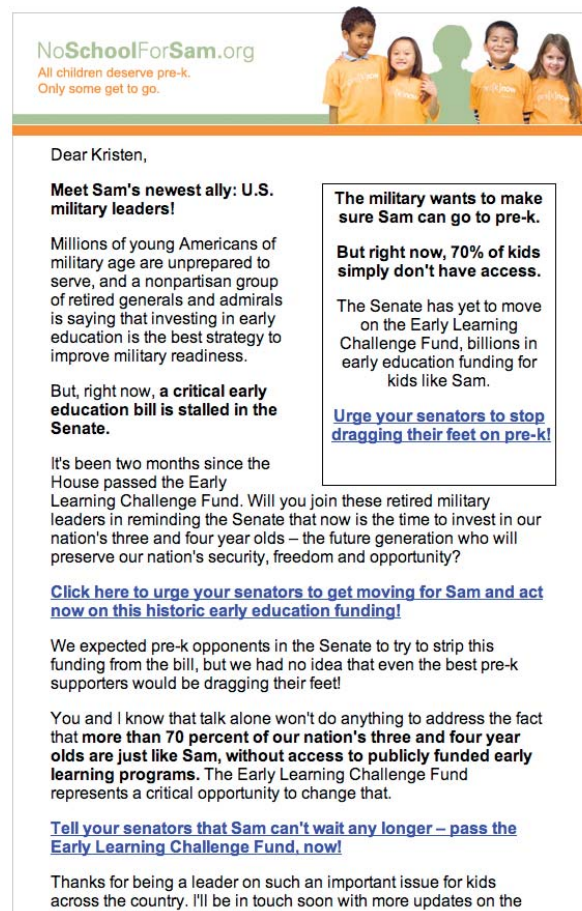
Federal Policy

Pre-K Now also supports efforts to educate federal policy makers. Federal policy plays two crucial roles: funding services, mostly for at-risk children, that establish a foundation on which states can build to reach a broader population and offering incentives to improve the quality of services, including teacher training, data collection and program monitoring. Although Head Start and Early Head Start are early learning programs for the nation's poorest children and funding under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act can be used to support

pre-k,⁵ no federal funding source is dedicated to leverage state early education investments. A top priority of the campaign has been securing such a federal funding stream for state pre-k, and during the 110th Congress, Pre-K Now helped draft bills in both the House and Senate to create such an investment.⁶ The House Education and Labor Committee approved the Providing Resources Early for Kids Act (PRE-K Act) with bipartisan support, but the legislation did not come up for a vote in the full body.⁷ In 2009, the Obama administration proposed a new "Early Learning Challenge Fund" to support competitive grants to help states improve coordination and quality in serving children from birth to age five.⁸

Figure 2:

"No School for Sam" e-alert



Other federal advocacy goals have included improving and increasing Head Start, expanding the Higher Education Act to provide professional development to pre-k teachers and increasing funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant and incentives to improve services, including teacher training, data collection and quality assurance.⁹ Pre-K Now's federal work builds on the expertise of state pre-k leaders, and the frequent policy alerts from the Washington, D.C. office help state advocates stay up to date on federal activity so that they can be effective in communicating with their members of Congress. In 2007, Pre-K Now created an e-advocacy campaign entitled "No School for Sam," (see Figure 2) with its own website and email list, which reaches over 50,000 people. Over one weekend in early 2009, an alert from this "campaign within a campaign" led to 7,600 letters urging Congress to include early education funding in the federal stimulus package, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Ultimately, after efforts by many groups, federal lawmakers included \$2.1 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start in the ARRA as well as substantial funds for several other vital early childhood and education programs.¹⁰

Engaging New Constituencies

Another part of the Pew pre-k strategy was to provide information and support to 30 national groups from across the political spectrum to develop their own voice on early childhood education. Most of these were membership organizations that engage key constituencies, many from outside the child advocacy field, at the state and national levels. Business leaders, older adults, law enforcement officers, K-12 educators, physicians and many others came to realize they each had their own unique reasons to support pre-k and were willing to provide their own distinct and compelling messages on pre-k's benefits for children and their communities.

So the strategy combined supporting unusual voices, which could capture policy makers' attention in new ways, with traditional children's organizations on the ground in states, who knew the issues and how to mobilize their base. Pew's role was to help all these national partners and state campaigns coordinate their efforts so that national groups' members in the states worked closely with the local leaders, messages were aligned and all the organizations were using the best research. The president and CEO of Illinois Action for Children, Maria Whelan, observed, "Mobilizing new messengers as well as grassroots children's organizations was key to our success."

For example, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids engaged law enforcement using evidence of pre-k's benefits for crime reduction; Generations United helped seniors to step forward and an array of education organizations engaged everyone from elementary school principals to school board members to chief state school officers. Pew also collaborated with other funders and hedge fund manager Robert Dugger¹¹ to create a new project, called the Partnership for America's Economic Success, to mobilize the critical constituency of business leaders around a range of proven interventions for young children. Finally, a separate but related strategy was

Strategic Partnerships with 30 National Organizations

- **Research experts** – National Institute for Early Education Research, MDRC
 - **Policy makers** – National Governors Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Lieutenant Governors Association, National League of Cities
 - **Law enforcement** – Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
 - **Business** – Partnership for America's Economic Success, National Association of Manufacturers, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, America's Edge, Committee for Economic Development
 - **K-12 education** – Council of Chief State School Officers, National Association of State Boards of Education, National School Boards Association, National Association of Elementary School Principals
 - **African American and Latino leaders** – United Negro College Fund, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, National Council of La Raza, Latinos United
 - **Early childhood** – T.E.A.C.H.® Early Childhood Project, Every Child Matters, American Montessori Society
 - **Seniors** – Generations United
 - **Physicians** – Docs for Tots
 - **Military** – Mission: Readiness, Military Child Education Coalition
 - **Journalists** – Hechinger Institute for Education and the Media, Education Writers Association
 - **Legal** – Education Law Center
 - **Faith community** – Shepherd the Next Generation
-

to engage organizations that provide information to the media, not as advocates, but to help them understand the research and the role that pre-k plays in education reform.

By cultivating the knowledge and participation of both familiar and new allies and providing them with the data necessary to support their unique perspectives on the importance of early learning, Pew built a nationwide coalition that reflected the breadth of pre-k's potential benefits and effectively communicated that wide-ranging value to policy makers.

A New Campaign Design

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New York

*Karen Schimke, President, Schuyler Center
for Analysis and Advocacy*

Winning Beginning NY is a tightly focused campaign that, with Pew's help, has used an array of creative strategies to protect and expand pre-k in New York. When legislation creating New York's *Universal Prekindergarten Program (UPK)* was enacted in 1997,^a people struggled to understand that this really was something different from kindergarten. It became clear that advocates in the state needed to engage everyone – policy makers, elected officials, the media and the public – to explain that the K-12 educational model was changing. There was now a new first year of education, and it was pre-k.

To ensure the promise of the legislation would be fulfilled, advocates used funding from Pew to mount a significant communications campaign to explain the benefits of pre-k and to make it a household word. Advocates created a name for the campaign, which appeared on products and in print media across the state, such as posters, ads in the legislative newspaper, animal crackers, correspondence, etc., and promoted the long-term results for children and society. This aggressive public outreach helped people understand how pre-k could benefit their children.

Then in 2003, the governor proposed eliminating pre-k and cutting deeply into other education funding.^b Winning Beginning NY joined a broad range of education advocates to form a campaign for “pre-k through post-grad.”^c With help

from Pew, other allies were galvanized as well. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids mobilized law enforcement, and Docs for Tots engaged physicians to support early education. In many ways, this was the turning point for early education, as it became the starting place for a P-20 system. These efforts generated over 100 articles in newspapers and other publications – some accusing the governor of making a huge mistake – as well as thousands of messages to the governor from every corner of the state.^d

Because of these coordinated, strategic efforts, many more people knew what pre-k was and why it was important; cuts were avoided and funding grew steadily through FY08. At a 2009 meeting about education funding, hosted by the Board of Regents, every single stakeholder was deeply committed to pre-k, which was described as the number one strategy for advancing education reform.

Pew's work met two important needs, providing both a national voice and state-specific help, such as resources for organizing; ongoing strategic advice; timely, relevant research and mobilization of new messengers. While the journey is not over – many children still don't have access to pre-k – stakeholders from all across New York recognize it as an essential part of a high-quality education that will help children succeed.

a National Prekindergarten Center, “Prekindergarten Policy Framework,” University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~NPC/framework/framework.cfm?section_num=6&subsection_num=1.

b Linda Saslow, “High-Need Children to Lose in Pataki Cuts,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 16, 2003.

c “March on May 3rd in Albany for Public Education, Pre-K through Post-Grad,” New York State Educational Conference Board and Public Higher Education Conference Board, <http://www.marchforpubliceducation.org/>.

d See for example: Cecelia Resti, “Please, Syracuse, Don’t Quietly Let State Starve Schools,” *The Post-Standard*, Apr. 3, 2003; Regina Eaton, “At Issue: State Budget,” *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, Apr. 15, 2003.

Tennessee

*Jennifer V. Doctors, The Pew Charitable Trusts, with
Diane Neighbors, Vice-Mayor of Nashville*

Beginning in 2005, advocates in Tennessee built a broad coalition, the Tennessee Alliance for Early Education, to support the governor's commitment to build a high-quality pre-kindergarten program for all children. With encouragement and technical assistance from Pre-K Now, two grassroots early education groups – Stand for Children and the Tennessee Association for the Education of Young Children – took a “big-tent” approach, bringing together advocates from a wide range of issue areas with local chambers of commerce and law enforcement and engaging with state policy makers on both sides of the aisle.

As the Alliance was forming, coalition members and Pre-K Now reached out to the governor's office, state education agency officials and legislators and formed strong, collaborative relationships around a shared commitment to young children's early learning. This diverse group, including people from both inside and outside government, worked together over the months and years to develop recommendations that could inform early education policy making in the state.

The Alliance organized statewide meetings and led policy maker-outreach efforts. Pre-K Now provided critical assistance to help coalition members respond to questions, educate members of the media and the public and build support from a bipartisan majority in the state legislature. In just the campaign's first year, this inclusive strategy won a tremendous victory: a \$20 million funding increase to support 250 new classrooms, which more than doubled pre-k enrollment in Tennessee.^a The momentum around pre-k has also enabled children's advocates to win passage of increased reimbursement rates for quality child care across the state.^b

In the years since the campaign's launch, Pew has continued to support local advocates as they push for high-quality pre-k for all four year olds in Tennessee. Pre-K Now staff have travelled to Nashville to provide information about the educational benefits of high-quality pre-k, and National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) experts have testified on the economic returns.

As of 2008, *Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K*, which began as a small pilot in 1998, is among the nation's highest quality pre-k programs, meeting nine of the 10 NIEER benchmarks and serving 21 percent of four year olds as well as some three year olds.^c Funding has grown from \$10 million in FY05 to more than \$83 million for FY10.^d The Alliance boasts nearly 900 members and continues to pursue its goal of voluntary pre-k for all children in Tennessee.^e In addition, Pew provides resources to other national organizations working in partnership with the Alliance, including Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, which engages law enforcement as advocates for children, and Shepherding the Next Generation, a faith-based child and youth advocacy organization.

By deploying the full complement of its resources – not only significant dollars, but also technical and topical expertise, strategic communications, engagement with non-traditional allies and truly nonpartisan policy maker outreach – Pew has helped advocates and leaders in Tennessee create a model for state progress on early learning. Their work has forged a high-quality pre-k program that gives children a better chance at success in school and life and is making that opportunity available to more and more young children every year.

a “Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K Fiscal Year 2006,” (Washington, DC: Pre-K Now, 2005).

b Personal communication with Alice Pearson Chapman, Email.

c W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool: 2008 State Preschool Yearbook,” (New Brunswick: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2008).

d Pre-K Now, “Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K Fiscal Year 2010,” (Washington, DC: Pew Center on the States, 2009).

e “Tennessee Alliance for Early Education Public Membership List,” (2010). http://www.prekfortn.com/docs/Membership_updatedFeb.pdf.

A New Campaign Design

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National Outreach

Pre-K Now also worked to raise the visibility of pre-k nationally. While many foundations have supported general public-awareness campaigns, Pew's approach is distinct in that public outreach is tightly aligned with focused advocacy. For example, Pre-K Now hosted several live, interactive, national satellite conferences. Advocates around the country organized local viewing sites, with the 2008 event attracting 4,000 viewers in 185 locations. At these conference sites, people gathered together to hear and speak with national leaders and then discuss their own advocacy plans without having to travel outside the state. Pre-K Now also produced a steady stream of reports that have generated significant media coverage, with the most recent report on state progress in fiscal year 2010 covered in over 3,000 broadcast and print stories.

Independent Research

Ongoing, objective research is critical to answering key policy questions, including assessing the impact of current pre-k programs. To provide that data, Pew funded economist Steven Barnett to form an independent research entity, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. The Institute, led by Barnett and child development expert Ellen Frede, independently assesses the costs, benefits and status of modern pre-k programs. Its research strives to: (a) increase transparency and accountability for early childhood policies; (b) conduct and translate research that will provide a basis for more effective early education and (c) answer the questions that policy makers have about what works before they invest significant additional resources in this new policy. NIEER leaders have testified before or provided formal assistance and information to policy makers in every state and 25 foreign countries.¹²

Jason Sabo, Senior Vice President,
United Ways of Texas

The focus on pre-k allowed us to win incremental victories for kids, session after session, when little else would have moved in our state. Combined, these incremental victories equal a significant step forward for the children of Texas.

One product that has become an essential tool for advocates and policy makers alike is NIEER's annual yearbook of state pre-k programs, which is now the standard reference on progress in the field. The report has also become a key motivator, with states watching closely to see if policy changes will improve their status.¹³ Other NIEER studies have addressed key questions of how much pre-k and at what level of quality will provide what level of impact. Another major effort to which NIEER contributed was a comprehensive meta-analysis summarizing decades of research on the short- and long-term effects of early care and education.¹⁴ NIEER also provides quick-response data for advocates and decision makers in the midst of pressing policy debates.

While Pew collaborates with NIEER in identifying which questions are most crucial to answer, NIEER has complete autonomy in conducting its research, translating research from the field for policy makers and the public and releasing its findings. With a board of advisers consisting of many top scholars, a peer-reviewed policy report series and a long list of publications in peer-reviewed journals, NIEER has extensive credibility in the field.

Strategic Design Choices

Beginning in 2001, Pew made a number of strategic choices both in the initial design and ongoing implementation of the campaign – some widely supported, others more controversial. Collectively, these choices represent a distinctive approach to advocacy that has helped propel this issue forward.

Focus

Advocates agree that every state should have a broad vision of what children need for a good start in life. Less consensus exists on the question of how to achieve that vision. While many states may be able to make small progress on multiple children's issues at the same time, big victories require a relentless focus on specific priorities. As described above, the key is not ignoring other issues, but rather having a plan to bring them to the forefront when the public is ready to tackle them.

When Pew's effort started, pre-k was not widely known as a distinct education program; the focused attention of this campaign has dramatically increased its visibility among policy makers and has solidified its place within the comprehensive set of family, education, health and other supports that prepares children for success. As Jason Sabo, senior vice president of public policy at the United Ways of Texas noted, "The focus on pre-k allowed us to win incremental victories for kids, session after session, when little else would have moved in our state. Combined, these incremental victories equal a significant step forward for the children of Texas."

States have also found that the popularity of pre-k has heightened awareness of the need to support high-quality programs for even younger children. For example, in Oklahoma, according to Assistant State Superintendent of Education Ramona Paul, the attention on pre-k has helped encourage partnerships

to establish high-quality infant and toddler programs. With this in mind, Pew has added two campaigns, on home visiting and children's dental health, so that states where those issues are coming to the fore can also capitalize on that momentum.

Pre-K for All

In the debate over using public funds to serve all children versus limiting eligibility, the disagreement in the field is not where pre-k policy should start, only where it should end. Virtually everyone agrees with serving the most at-risk children first. Likewise, there is agreement that, overall, poor children need more extensive help than children of middle-income and affluent families. In short, "universal" services does not mean "identical." And Pew has supported targeting federal funds at low-income children, with states building on that foundation.

The difference arises between those whose policy approach would go no further than the poorest children and those, including Pew, who focus on the importance of every child having an early learning opportunity. Three main arguments support a "pre-k-for-all" policy. First, while there is very little doubt that pre-k has the greatest impact on low-income children, data show that middle-class children benefit as well. Many start kindergarten unprepared, and studies of state pre-k in Oklahoma showed significant benefits for children whose family income was too high to qualify for free- or reduced-price-lunch programs. Children in families just above the poverty line often have the least access to high-quality pre-k.¹⁵ Further, while the return on investment *per child* is greatest for targeted programs, broader ones will generate a greater *total* benefit.

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Secondly, while programs that target only poor children have historically struggled to serve even all their eligible kids, policies that strive to eventually provide pre-k for all are much more likely to reach both the most at-risk children and those who have the least access to early education: those from working-class families.¹⁶ Third, in some states, such as New York, Oklahoma and Tennessee, widespread coverage can also contribute to a larger base of support, which can lead to more stable, higher quality programs.¹⁷ So Pew's focus on making pre-k available to every three and four year old is research based and strategic.

For example, even after 40 years, the federal Head Start program still only serves half of eligible children¹⁸ and many states, including Texas and Delaware, have had the same modest level of pre-k for poor children for years.¹⁹ As Diane Neighbors, a leading child advocate and vice-mayor of Nashville, Tennessee, said, "By declaring a goal of pre-k for all children, we are able to keep pushing for funding increases over time, instead of stopping when we've covered only the most at-risk children." Indeed, Pew has supported campaigns that achieved pre-k expansion to serve a substantial majority of children, even if covering every child is a far-off goal. For example, according to Rich Huddleston, executive director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, "The Arkansas initiative uses a variety of pre-k services that now reaches almost half of four year olds and one-third of three year olds in a high-quality program and aims to reach 70 percent of both – far more than would be the case if we simply stopped at all poor children."

One interesting note is that the "for all" philosophy is identical to the approach in Australia and the United Kingdom. The vision outlined in the Australian government's 2009 report, "Investing in the Early Years: A National Early Childhood Development Strategy,"²⁰ includes "a core universal provision linked to a range of targeted and intensive services" with the specific goal of "universal access to quality early childhood education for all children in the year before school by 2013." The report notes:

"There is also longitudinal evidence from the United Kingdom, based on a sample of over 3,000 children, that quality early childhood education benefit[s] all children and that disadvantaged children benefit more if they attend centres with a mix of children from different social backgrounds...[W]hile the return from some early childhood programs provided to all children would be lower than for targeted programs, it would still be positive overall. This is because all children and families require some support at different times and the largest group of vulnerable children, in terms of actual numbers, is in the middle of the social gradient. Other advantages of universal programs may include greater accessibility, reduced stigma, and a role in assessing and referring those children in need of additional support."



Capturing Evidence of Impact:

Education and Economic Development

Pre-k was not always associated with education. So, early on, the campaign made a point to emphasize the benefits of pre-k for children's educational success. This helped build a broad base of public support and gain new allies – particularly the educational community, which has been under increasing pressure to show improved student performance on third-grade tests. According to Robert Sexton, executive director of the influential Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in Kentucky, "This message enabled us to effectively move the issue as part of our education reform agenda." The educational focus also allowed campaigns to avoid divisive debates and distracting side issues and helped make the case for high-quality services rather than a maximum number of minimal quality hours.

In addition, as the public has come to better understand pre-k for three and four year olds as education, it has set the stage for acceptance of the idea that programs for even younger children should also create an environment that promotes early learning. Richard C. Alexander, a business leader in Oregon and chair of the Ready for School Campaign, noted,

"The successful and focused first step – reaching 3,000 at-risk preschoolers through Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten Programs – is an important stake in the ground in building a case for reaching children even earlier in their development. It is helping us move to Early Head Start as the next step in establishing a continuum of proven early childhood interventions in Oregon for our most vulnerable children prenatal to five."

Linda Smith, executive director of the National Association for Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, observes that, "The attention generated by the pre-k movement has helped elevate the recognition that all care for young children should be considered educational as well as nurturing. It will help us make new progress in improving the entire child care system." Voices for America's Children president and CEO Bill Bentley agreed: "Moving the pre-k agenda throughout the country ... was extremely important to advancing broader early childhood efforts nationally."

While this focus has been effective, it has also raised some concerns. One is that certain states offer a half-day program with no connection to the additional hours of care working parents need. To address this, Pew supports a diverse delivery system, with pre-k offered not only in schools, but in a variety of community-based settings, such as child care and Head Start centers. This arrangement provides parents with more options, builds on the many good providers already operating and helps improve the overall system, including the quality of services for infants and toddlers.

Two years into the campaign, a major development occurred: Economists began analyzing the economic development benefits of high-quality pre-k. The new field of study was mainly spurred by the publication of an article by Arthur Rolnick and Rob Grunewald of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, which presented data showing pre-k for poor children to be an economic development strategy with a 16 percent rate of return, better than most stock portfolios.²¹ Their article resonated with previous research showing a positive cost-benefit ratio for early care and education, but it also captured the public attention in a new way that heavily influenced the policy debate.²²

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This new recognition of the wide-ranging economic impact of pre-k revolutionized the outreach to business leaders and prompted even more policy makers to champion early education. It is also helping to lift the debate out of the quagmire of pitting children's programs against one another. It is not a victory for children if pre-k is funded at the expense of other effective programs. Rather than children's programs competing over which has the highest cost-benefit ratio, all government expenditures become open to scrutiny for their benefits to the economy. Data show that many programs for young children, especially pre-k, are supported by far more evidence of both efficacy and return on investment than other programs that claim to support economic vitality.²³

Selecting States

Rather than picking one set of states for the duration of the 10-year campaign, Pew looked for states that presented opportunities to move the issue and re-evaluated those choices each year. Policy change takes a long-term investment, so the campaign did not move in and out of states rapidly. Instead, every year, staff and local advocates reexamined states' leadership and the political context to determine if the environment continued to provide opportunities for victories or had become so unfavorable that forward progress seemed impossible. As a result, new states were added as their campaigns became viable, while others facing obstacles decreased their direct advocacy or pursued planning activities until conditions changed. Even partners without active campaigns were welcomed at networking meetings and had access to other Pre-K Now supports.

Pushing for Quality

Preparing children for success requires, at a minimum, well-trained teachers, small classes and a good environment, none of which is cheap. Virtually every state has wrestled with whether to start with a program that reaches many children and all corners of the state but features only modest standards, or a high-quality one with limited availability. Pew staff recommend the latter — the risk is simply too great that a low-quality program will fail kids, hurting both the children and the opportunity for expansion. Alabama Governor Bob Riley also took a quality-first approach, noting, "Starting with a small, high-quality program allowed us to learn how to make it work in our state and to show it is a wise investment of taxpayer dollars."²⁴

Promoting Accountability

As part of our efforts to ensure that current pre-k programs are working well, Pew, with funding from the Foundation for Child Development and the Joyce Foundation, created the National Task Force on Early Childhood Accountability. This effort, chaired by Sharon Lynn Kagan and staffed by Thomas Schultz, used a national advisory committee to develop recommendations for states on creating systems to evaluate the success of their pre-k programs. The report, *Taking Stock: Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality*, is available on the Pew website.²⁵

According to Schultz, several states, including Connecticut, Louisiana, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, have used information from the report to establish or improve accountability systems for documenting children's early learning and school readiness. In addition, the report influenced two major initiatives, undertaken by national organizations, to develop better data collection and research-based learning standards for early childhood.²⁶

Leading with Services to Build Systems

Simply funding new classrooms isn't enough. To be effective, services need support systems that, for example, prepare well-trained teachers, build facilities, monitor quality and keep the books. Efforts to design and create these infrastructure systems are important, and a key question is how to secure public resources to support them. It is difficult to convince the public to pay for systems directly, because the connection to children's success is difficult to demonstrate. So, Pew chose a strategy of asking the public to support funding for services that is robust enough to include the infrastructure that enables them to work effectively and ensures quality and accountability.

The strategy is helping: One indicator, the number of programs meeting at least eight of NIEER's 10 quality benchmarks, has risen from five in 2002 to 18 in 2008.²⁷ Ceil Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, notes that "the high quality standards and accompanying financing of our pre-k program enabled us to build professional development systems that have helped almost all our teachers gain a bachelor's degree." New Mexico Lieutenant Governor Diane Denish is proud that "our pre-k campaign for New Mexico's children has also helped generate funds for both professional development and new facilities – critical parts of our whole early education system."



Bill Bentley, President and CEO,
Voices for America's Children

Moving the pre-k agenda throughout the country ... was extremely important to advancing broader early childhood efforts nationally.

Building on the Best of Early Childhood and K-12 Education

The theme of school readiness has proven to be powerful and unifying. In addition, linking pre-k to the K-12 system is helpful because of the latter's higher expectations for quality and more stable funding. At the same time, simply adapting regular education programs to younger children has drawbacks and risks compromising the nurturing quality of infant programs that is also important for pre-k children (as well as older children). So, the campaign has tried to promote an ideal pre-kindergarten system that would borrow from both. From the services for the youngest children, advocates have urged developmentally appropriate practice that uses play to help children learn and accommodates different learning styles and paces. From the K-12 system, advocates fought for credentialed teachers, good pay, quality assurance and carefully chosen curricula. A good example of this is in Oklahoma, where according to Ramona Paul, "the pre-k program has the strong credential requirements and quality assurance procedures associated with K-12 while also providing a nurturing program that reflects the particular needs of very young children."

Seeing Results

While there can be endless debates about individual strategy questions, the ultimate test of any policy is the results. Progress in the states indicates that the pre-k movement has taken hold. In the media, it has risen from the occasional human interest story about parents camping out to secure a coveted classroom slot to a regular part of the education beat, with almost 4,900 print articles on pre-k, preschool or early education in 2008. (Print stories mentioning the phrase “pre-k” grew from 155 in 2000 to almost 900 in 2008.) It has transformed from a soft social policy topic to a key economic development strategy and has moved from relative obscurity to a leading election issue. Pre-k was a major element of former Virginia Governor Tim Kaine’s education platform when he ran for office in 2005; Governor Bob Riley of Alabama has been a consistent champion for pre-k for the past several years; and in 2008, Democratic and Republican presidential candidates included pre-kindergarten in their policy positions.²⁸ Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell protected early education when battles over the state budget reached historic proportions in 2009.²⁹



Lieutenant Governor Diane Denish, D-New Mexico

Our pre-k campaign for New Mexico’s children has also helped generate funds for both professional development and new facilities – critical parts of our whole early education system.

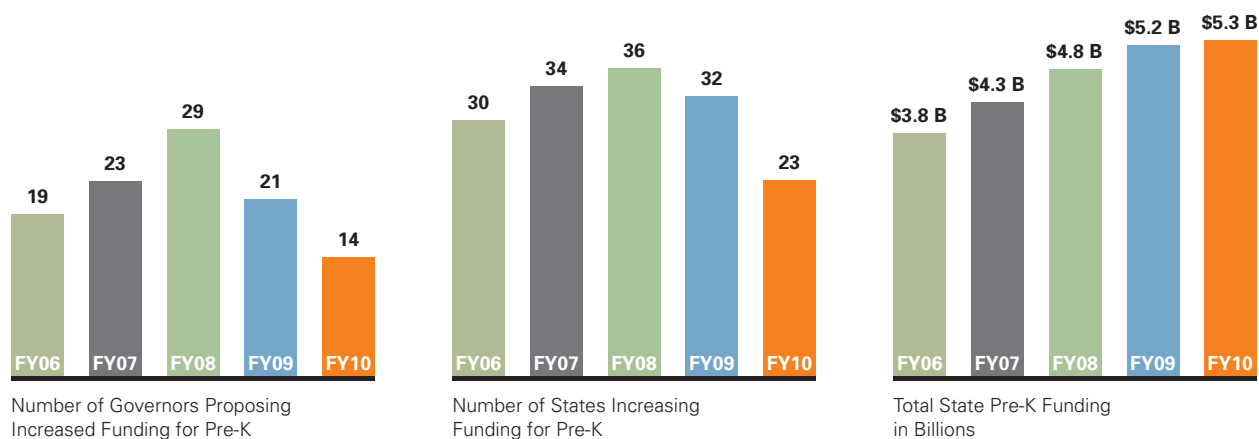
And the new programs are working. Studies by NIEER and others show that pre-k programs in California, New Jersey, New Mexico and Oklahoma produced significant gains in children’s early math and literacy skills.³⁰ While states must wait for the long-term gains, they are already seeing immediate benefits: In New Jersey, schools with pre-k programs saw retention in first grade drop by as much as 50 percent.³¹

But there is still much work to do. As of the 2008-09 school year, 61 percent of four year olds and 86 percent of three year olds did not have access to state- or federally funded pre-kindergarten.³² Ten states provide no pre-k program at all.³³ And many of the programs are not yet high quality. For instance, seven state programs still meet five or fewer of the 10 NIEER benchmarks.³⁴ Recent budget battles show that early education remains vulnerable: 10 states decreased their funding for 2010, and in FY09, per-child expenditures declined for the first time in two years.³⁵ Organizations, publications and events designed to improve American education still do not always include pre-k as part of the solution. The U.S. has a long way to go to match the national commitments of competitor nations, especially France, Australia and the U.K., to provide every child with a core educational experience before kindergarten.

State Progress on Pre-K

- Over the past eight years, the results have been dramatic:
- Combined data from NIEER and Pre-K Now show that state funding for pre-k rose from \$2.4 billion in FY02 to \$5.3 billion for FY10. In the 2009 legislative session, 29 states increased or held steady their spending on pre-k, despite a deep recession.^a
 - Since 2002, state pre-k enrollment has grown by more than 450,000 children.^b
 - Five states – Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana and West Virginia – as well as Washington, DC passed legislation or constitutional amendments that promise voluntary pre-k for all four year olds, with full access typically phased in over several years. Pre-k-for-all plans in Illinois and Washington, DC also include three year olds.^c
 - Five states – Iowa, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey and Rhode Island – added pre-k to their school funding formulas.^d
 - In 2009, two of the 12 states with no pre-k – Alaska and Rhode Island – began pilot programs.^e
 - The number of states with programs that meet eight or more of NIEER's 10 quality benchmarks grew from five in 2002 to 18 in 2008.^f

Pre-K Funding Trends – FY06 – FY10^g



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What's Next

While Pew has played a critical role in advancing pre-k policy, keeping the momentum going will require the efforts of many other groups. Fortunately, many established K-12 education organizations are expanding their agendas to include P-16, and Pew staff will work with them to incorporate pre-k as part of their ongoing missions. For example, the Data Quality Campaign was created to improve longitudinal data systems across the traditional educational spectrum, but with funding and support from Pew and the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, it will extend its reach to include programs for younger children. Pew also hopes to work collaboratively alongside other new foundation efforts, such as the Kellogg Foundation's initiative for children birth to age eight, the Birth to Five Policy Alliance and First Five Years Fund, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's new project on reading success, to promote smart advocacy on key early childhood issues.

The success of the pre-k campaign has shown that this formula of a focused, evidence-based, bipartisan agenda, good research and smart advocacy can be used to win new victories for kids. As mentioned earlier, in 2008, Pew added two campaigns – to support

proven, voluntary home visiting programs for at-risk new and expectant families and children's dental health. Other funders, including the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation, have joined these efforts. Many of the pre-k states have taken on home visiting in particular as a logical next step in building a comprehensive system for young children. This trio of policy goals gives us a foothold in the three major areas of young children's development – family, education and health – and enables our partners to lead with the issues that are most ripe for movement in their states. The key to success is continuing to learn, constantly honing strategies and always presenting the strongest data on the best policies for children, their families, states and the nation.

The national movement for high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all three and four year olds has made great gains over the past decade. Going forward, the partnerships built among foundations, advocates, policy makers, business leaders, law enforcement, educators and families across the country will be the catalyst for continued work to ensure that states invest taxpayer dollars in proven programs that help all children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.



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Pew Pre-K Campaign at a Glance

The Pew Center on the States is a division of The Pew Charitable Trusts that identifies and advances effective solutions to critical issues facing states. Pew is a nonprofit organization that applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life.

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Key Differentiators: Pre-K Now

- Focuses exclusively on pre-k
- Provides the most up-to-date gauge of the pre-k pulse in any state
- Offers nationwide access to pre-k advocates
- Monitors and distributes daily pre-k newsclips
- Provides a national perspective on local pre-k issues
- Provides outreach, policy and Spanish-language information targeted to the Latino community
- Leads a national movement which has gained significant momentum in the last five years

The Case for Pre-K

- Pre-k benefits all children academically, socially and emotionally.
- High-quality pre-k for all nets a high return on investment in children and the community.
- The most important brain development occurs by age six.
- Pre-k is the first step to education reform.



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